

# **Pandemic Influenza Planning: A Guide for Individuals and Families**




**Get Information. Stay Informed.**

---

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
May 2006**





**“While the Federal Government will use all resources at its disposal to prepare for and respond to an influenza pandemic, it cannot do the job alone. This effort requires the full participation of and coordination by all levels of government and all segments of society... perhaps most important, addressing the challenge will require active participation by individual citizens in each community across our Nation.”**

***George W. Bush, President  
United States of America***

**“Pandemics are global in nature, but their impact is local. When the next pandemic strikes, as it surely will, it is likely to touch the lives of every individual, family, and community. Our task is to make sure that when this happens, we will be a Nation prepared.”**

***Michael O. Leavitt, Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services***



# **Pandemic Influenza – Get Informed. Be Prepared**

This guide is designed to help you understand the threat of a pandemic influenza outbreak in our country and your community. It describes commonsense actions you can take now in preparing for a pandemic. We cannot predict how severe the next pandemic will be or when it will occur, but being prepared may help lower the impact of an influenza pandemic on you and your family. Additional information including a planning checklist for individuals and families can be found at

[www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).

## **What You Need to Know**

An influenza (flu) pandemic is a worldwide outbreak of flu disease that occurs when a new type of influenza virus appears that people have not been exposed to before (or have not been exposed to in a long time). The pandemic virus can cause serious illness because people do not have immunity to the new virus. Pandemics are different from seasonal outbreaks of influenza that we see every year. Seasonal influenza is caused by influenza virus types to which people have already been exposed. Its impact on society is less severe than a pandemic, and influenza vaccines (flu shots and nasal-spray vaccine) are available to help prevent widespread illness from seasonal flu.

Influenza pandemics are different from many of the other major public health and health care threats facing our country and the world. A pandemic will last much longer than most flu outbreaks and may include “waves” of influenza activity that last 6-8 weeks separated by months. The number of health care workers and first responders able to work may be reduced. Public health officials will not know how severe a pandemic will be until it begins.

## A Historical Perspective

In the last century there were three influenza pandemics. All of them were called pandemics because of their worldwide spread and because they were caused by a new influenza virus. The 1918 pandemic was especially severe.

---

**1918-1919 Most severe, caused at least 675,000 U.S. deaths and up to 50 million deaths worldwide.**

---

**1957-1958 Moderately severe, caused at least 70,000 U.S. deaths and 1-2 million deaths worldwide.**

---

**1968-1969 Least severe, caused at least 34,000 U.S. deaths and 700,000 deaths worldwide.**

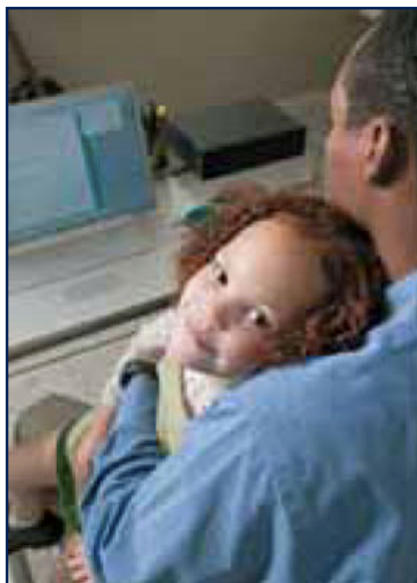
---

## Some Differences Between Seasonal Flu and Pandemic Flu

Seasonal Flu	Pandemic Flu
Caused by influenza viruses that are similar to those already circulating among people.	Caused by a new influenza virus that people have not been exposed to before. Likely to be more severe, affect more people, and cause more deaths than seasonal influenza because people will not have immunity to the new virus.
Symptoms include fever, headache, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny nose, and muscle pain. Deaths can be caused by complications such as pneumonia.	Symptoms similar to the common flu but may be more severe and complications more serious.
Healthy adults usually not at risk for serious complications (the very young, the elderly, and those with certain underlying health conditions at increased risk for serious complications).	Healthy adults may be at increased risk for serious complications.
Every year in the United States, on average: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 5% to 20% of the population gets the flu;</li><li>• More than 200,000 people are hospitalized from flu complications; and</li><li>• About 36,000 people die from flu.</li></ul>	The effects of a severe pandemic could be much more damaging than those of a regular flu season. It could lead to high levels of illness, death, social disruption, and economic loss. Everyday life could be disrupted because so many people in so many places become seriously ill at the same time. Impacts could range from school and business closings to the interruption of basic services such as public transportation and food delivery.

## Importance and Benefits of Being Prepared

The effects of a pandemic can be lessened if you prepare ahead of time. Preparing for a disaster will help bring peace of mind and confidence to deal with a pandemic.



When a pandemic starts, everyone around the world could be at risk. The United States has been working closely with other countries and the World Health Organization (WHO) to strengthen systems to detect outbreaks of influenza that might cause a pandemic.

A pandemic would touch every aspect of society, so every part of society must begin to prepare. All have roles in the event of a pandemic. Federal, state, tribal, and local governments are developing, improving, and testing their plans for an influenza pandemic. Businesses, schools, universities, and other faith-based and community organizations are also preparing plans.

As you begin your individual or family planning, you may want to review your state's planning efforts and those of your local public health and emergency preparedness officials. State plans and other planning information can be found at [www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/checklists.html](http://www.pandemicflu.gov/plan/checklists.html).

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other federal agencies are providing funding, advice, and other support to your state. The federal government will provide up-to-date information and guidance to the public if an influenza pandemic unfolds. For reliable, accurate, and timely information, visit the federal government's official Web site at [www.pandemicflu.gov](http://www.pandemicflu.gov).